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1908

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TAFT'S

Training for the Presidency

By

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1908

THE CHAPPLE PRESS, BOSTON

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FEB 12 1910

TAFT'S TRAINING FOR THE PRESIDENCY

ONAPARTE'S inevitable question, "What has he done?" which was propounded whenever any man was proposed to him for high military command or responsible civil office, was based upon the soundest of common sense. When a board of directors seeks a general manager of a railroad, or when a housekeeper is looking for a cook, the first thing to be done is to determine what the applicant has done as an indication of what he can do. The most natural thing in the world is to test a man's future career by his past performances. A recommendation from a previous employer, a record of good work, a demonstration of executive capacity, are the things which

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tell in business and professional life the world over. Men who are about to be given the custody of trust funds are selected because of their probity and of their capacity alike. The honest fool is almost as dangerous as the clever knave. The man of affairs must combine capacity with honesty, and in the corporation or the household the natural instinct is to insist on an unimpeached record as an indispensable requisite for responsible employment.

The rule which works so well in the business world and in the household should be applied in the same degree to public affairs. The people have a right, although they do not always exercise it, to insist that men proposed for important public service shall have demonstrated not only their honesty, but their capacity. The greatest danger to republican institutions, as shown by the history of these United States, unquestionably lies in the proneness of the people to be led away by demagogues and to take men at their own estimate. This great country of ours is entitled at all times and in every

position to the services of men who are specially trained and specially adapted for their work. Now and then a new man in public life accidentally makes a success. Now and then a trained public man makes a failure in some new environment. As a rule, however, the people are best served by those who unite executive capacity with irresistible integrity. With two men equally honest, the people will stand the best chance with him who has demonstrated his capacity in different ways. Experience is often a bitter teacher, but it is always a teacher with those who are willing to learn. In politics, as in business, or in the law, or medicine, the intelligent man who profits by his opportunities and who has been tried in many different capacities is certain to succeed in a greater percentage of cases than he who has to attack each problem as a novelty. The young medical student just starting on a professional career might perform a difficult operation with entire safety to the patient, but the average man would hate to take the chance. No great corporation with a case

involving millions of dollars would entrust it to the young graduate from the law school, however intelligent he might be. No board of directors would entrust the property of their railroad and the lives of its patrons to a general manager who had had no more experience than that gained as rear brakeman on a suburban train.

* * *

It seems almost idle to express the opinion that training is necessary to success in any walk of life which requires unusual executive capacity, and yet our political history is full of the blunders of inefficient public men for which the people were responsible and of which they were, unfortunately, also the victims. It does not at all follow, because a man can turn a clever sentence or sway the passions of a multitude, or look well at the head of a procession, that he is necessarily fitted to be mayor of a great city or governor of an important state. The people have a right to expect that the men who come before them for important public offices shall be

able to demonstrate by their record that they are likely to succeed with the trust imposed upon them. The modern theory of civil service all tends to the idea that men should be tried in small things, promoted to greater ones, and finally elevated to command only by demonstration of honesty, ability, and peculiar capacity.

The presidency of the United States under modern conditions is not merely the greatest honor, but the greatest responsibility that can come to a living man. The successful performance of the duties of that office involves not alone devotion to the interests of the people and unquestioned integrity, for these qualities almost all of our Presidents have had. There is an absolute necessity for something greater and rarer than these common virtues. There must be genius for executive work, physical capacity for the endurance of severe official strain, patience and tact in dealing with other men, which comes only from the constant buffeting of official life, and a certain predisposition for the management of public affairs which

may, for want of a better term, be called the official temperament. If the people would be well served, they must of necessity select for the commander in chief of the Army and Navy and for the head of the civil government, some one who has the capacity for executive work at the outset, and whose whole education and training has fitted him for the duties he may be called upon to perform.

There is not a king or an emperor, no man in civil or military life, who wields such great individual power, who has such a personal capacity for good or evil, as the President of the United States. Under our system of government, in spite of the fact that Congress makes all the laws and the courts interpret them, and although the President can proceed only along lines carefully laid down for him in the statute books, he is, after all, practically omnipotent in the exercise of real power. He defines policies for the government, both domestic and foreign. He can save his country from war by sacrificing its honor, or he can precipitate his

people into a bloody conflict to satisfy his own ambition or because of an exaggerated incapacity to adjust a trivial quarrel. There are Presidents and Presidents. One may be a harmless nonentity, while his successor is quite likely to prove a menace to the peace and prosperity of the country. Both were honest, but both were deficient in training for their high office.

* * *

It will not do to select a President, who holds in the hollow of his hand the destinies of eighty millions of people and whose great power may be wielded for the good or the ill of other nations, merely because he has been successful in some one line of work. The good general, the popular preacher, and even the successful governor of a state, are all likely to be deficient in the peculiar experience which goes to fit a man for the highest national employment. The presidency is no place for a specialist. It needs rather the broadest training, the widest experience, the most general education, and the surest grasp

of the complex machinery which the American system of government has developed. Granting that all the persons now considered for the presidency have equal integrity, equal natural intelligence, and equal devotion to the interests of the people, it is a proper inquiry to determine whether any one of them is superior to the others in the peculiar training which is likely to fit a man for the tremendous responsibility devolving upon a President of the United States in the opening decade of the twentieth century, after more than a hundred years of successful national life under a republican form of government.

Applying Bonaparte's test question, "What has he done?" for the purpose of determining who would make the best successor to Theodore Roosevelt, one naturally thinks of William Howard Taft, if for no other reason, because his public career has been such as to give him, in all probability more experience as to the different lines of presidential work than any other American citizen of the present generation. By this

is meant merely that his public career has been such as to call for the exercise of personal supervision in an executive capacity over a wider range of governmental responsibility than any of the other persons mentioned for the presidency in any of the parties has been called upon to assume. The test will be, therefore, not so much as to Mr. Taft's experience, but as to whether he has "made good" at all times. That his public experience has been diversified to an extraordinary degree is scarcely a matter of argument. It is fair, and the people have a right to insist, that each of his official acts, every public responsibility he has assumed, every policy he has stood for, and everything he has done from his boyhood to the present day in his professional and official life, shall be subjected to the closest possible scrutiny, to determine whether he is fitted for the presidency or not. It happens that Secretary Taft has had a peculiar range of official life, so that, if he stands the test of what he has done in each case, if he can exhibit a record of executive capacity in half a

dozen different directions, extending over a long period of years, and if he can demonstrate the adaptability required in sudden transitions from domestic to foreign affairs, from the military to civil life, and from economics to abstract government, the people are likely to assume that he is the person best fitted for the presidency and, accordingly, to choose him for that high office.

* * *

It does not always do to go into the early life of a public man. Many a general, who was a success on the battlefield, was at the tail of his class in the military academy. Many a public man, full of years and of honors, gave no indication in his childhood of his success in life. Some of the greatest geniuses in their manhood were known as dolts in their college days. In the case of Mr. Taft the record is all the other way. Whether there be anything in ancestry or not, he comes of a family which left its impress on several communities before he saw the light of day. His grandfather and his father sat on the

Bench before he became a judge himself. His father was a cabinet officer, a diplomatist, and a public man with a wide reputation. The younger Taft was brought up in an atmosphere which tended to make him alive to questions of great public policy. Alphonso Taft was Secretary of War and then Attorney-General under Grant, while his son was still a student at Yale. The effect of this family environment is extremely important in determining the point of view of a young man who was subsequently to reach honors greater even than those which had come to his distinguished father.

To Alphonso Taft unquestionably belongs a great deal of the credit for the training in public affairs which was given to William Howard Taft. The old Judge, before he went into Grant's cabinet, was a man who made himself extremely active in the public life of Cincinnati. He was no legal fossil, no mere preacher of the abstract duties of a citizen. He met public issues and grappled with them, and the family life was such as to make every one of the boys acquainted

with these issues. It was Alphonso Taft who, as a judge, decided the question as to the use of the Bible in the public schools of Cincinnati; and it was this same Alphonso Taft who was constantly interested in the development of the commercial life of the city, serving with equal success as a school trustee and as a railroad director.

There was an element of sternness in the elder Taft which held the boy close to the performance of every duty presented to him, and this habit of application to the work at hand which was enforced during his boyhood days, is responsible for the present capacity for work which is the dominant feature of the official life of the second one of the family to be at the head of the War Department. Immense of frame, with a passionate fondness for outdoor life, a natural athlete, young Taft was nevertheless compelled from his earliest days to apply himself to his studies in the most exacting way. When he went to Yale, he first created the idolatry which followed him through the university, because he was the best man in

his class from a purely physical standpoint. It was the rigid discipline of the old Judge which kept "Bill" Taft off of the ball nine, the football team and the crew during all of his earlier college life. Best fitted of his class for any athletic exhibition, he was barred out of all such honors by the strict command of his father, and the result was that one of the greatest athletes and one of the strongest men ever known in the history of Yale was also one of the best scholars.

* * *

Endowed by nature with great strength and extraordinary capacity for physical endurance, and pushed to the limit of studious application by a stern but wise father, William Howard Taft was forced to become the best possible exemplification of the old Yale ideal of the sound mind in the sound body. This is important as bearing upon the claim of this man upon the presidency. The habit of studious application, the physical endurance, and the ability to blend the two things, have followed the career of this man

from his college days up to the present time. It is a combination rarely seen in public life. The biggest and the cleverest men are frequently irritable, dyspeptic and pessimistic. They are apt to see the hole instead of the doughnut, and the greatest orators have generally been the least inclined to prolonged physical exertion. Many a public man has trained himself to endure a period of incessant campaigning which would break down a prize-fighter, and yet he finds himself unable to endure the severe strain of continuous executive work. Many a man with abundant physical capacity is deficient in the power of application and the studious habits which are absolutely indispensable to a real mastery of public affairs. It is the combination of the two, the physical capacity to endure and the mental furniture to digest, which makes this man Taft so singularly fitted for the gravest and most engrossing political duties.

Whether the child is actually father of the man or not, it is easy to see that in the formative years of a college life, especially in

the case of a serious youngster, who has no wild oats to sow and no dark patches to hide, one may be able to trace the first steps in the growth toward the full stature of one of the really great men of the times. In the first place, no idler can secure the coveted honor of the salutatory in a Yale class. It means that he graduates second in rank among several hundred active young men, a great majority of whom are striving for every possible honor that can come to them. Such attainment is not reached except by hard grinding work, continued far into the night and persisted in when the boy would surely prefer to be with his fellows on the athletic field or engaged in wild celebrations upon the college campus. The mere fact that a man graduates from a great university with the highest honors, is sufficient demonstration of his intellectual capacity.

* * *

It is a popular notion that the successful student is pale, hollow-eyed, anemic and the very antithesis of the ideal athlete. It is

too often the case that much burning of the midnight oil builds up the brain at the expense of the rest of the body, but this certainly was not true of Taft. In the years he spent at Yale, from 1874 to 1878, there never was a time when his classmates could not point to him as their strongest man on the athletic field and about the most studious in the class room. There were others all about him, who were probably more brilliant, who learned more easily, who were more showy in their intellectual successes. Taft had to dig out a great deal of what he got by the hardest kind of hard work, but when he learned a thing, he had learned it for good and all. He was minutely painstaking in his studies, and there is scarcely any doubt that the habits he formed in his college days and nights have been the foundation stone of his success in life. It was no accident which enabled him to solve the mysterious problem of the Philippines, and he did not arrive at a comprehension of the engineering difficulties of the Panama Canal by any intellectual inspiration. He studied the prob-

lem set before him as he did his Euclid, and the results he achieved were honestly earned in every case by his own painstaking and minute investigation.

A man may smile and smile and be a villain still, so that it is hardly an argument for the elevation of this man to the presidency that he has laughed his way through life, and that he sees the heavenly humorous side of everything. At the same time one can readily understand that personal popularity, tact, courtesy and similar social qualities are absolutely indispensable to success in any great office. No general can inspire enthusiasm in his troops merely by discipline. No orator can sway a great multitude by mere logic. There is always the element of enthusiasm, of love, of personal devotion, which must be mixed with respect to secure results. It is therefore fair in this study of Taft and his qualifications for the presidency, to go back again to those college days merely long enough to say that in his class and in his time in the university he enjoyed that extraordinary popularity which college boys give to some

one of their idols, whether he be a fellow student or an instructor. This boy Taft, as he united the sound mind with the sound body, was immensely popular and at the same time was thoroughly respected by every one of the boys who lived close to him, and from that day to this probably understand him best. His capacity as a mixer, as one of those men to whom his fellows go when they are in distress, as a warm friend to his intimates and a "good fellow" to his casual acquaintances, has only been enlarged from year to year. Personal magnetism, infectious good humor, and a laugh which, although famous, is never forced, are not bad equipments for a public man who is called upon to meet all sorts and conditions of men day in and day out, and who has often to temper a refusal with a smile and possibly to assume a sternness he does not feel.

* * *

Secretary Taft's young manhood was a series of preparatory steps in the direction of an active career. He studied law, went

into society, was a reporter on a Cincinnati newspaper, and then became assistant prosecuting attorney. Up to that time, as the Secretary himself has confided to his friends, his knowledge of the law was purely theoretical. He was put into a position where he was forced to prepare cases with extreme rapidity, and in this subordinate position he learned his law as a practical science and not as an abstract one. He became collector of internal revenue in 1882 as an accident, having gone to Washington to consult the president regarding an intended diplomatic position for his father. The office was entirely outside of the line of his life's work and it is to his credit that he resigned it after ten months of faithful work, which, however, gave him a good insight into the mechanism of the federal government from a revenue standpoint. It was in 1885, when Mr. Taft was only twenty-eight years old, that he became assistant county solicitor, and his sole purpose in taking that office was to assist in a reform movement which, as people in Cincinnati know, was entirely successful. Young Taft

and the men associated with him succeeded after a long fight in breaking up the practice of corrupting juries and in driving out of town the principal offenders. It was a battle fought outright for the people and for the purification of the courts. It was a practical initiation behind the scenes of municipal politics, and one can readily read from the history of that time the high ideal of political morality which has actuated Secretary Taft during all of his public life, and which but a few years ago impelled him to resign a seat on the Supreme Bench of the United States, for which he had longed during all his professional career, merely because he felt he had not finished the work he undertook for a few million of little brown men on the other side of the globe.

As Judge of the Superior Court of Ohio, and as Solicitor-General of the United States, Mr. Taft for five years or so was chiefly engaged in building up a professional reputation which would be an enviable possession to any man, if there were nothing else to add to it. These were the days when the work of the

lawyer was the main thing in his career. He was interested in national affairs by inheritance and by early training, and yet he neither sought nor cared for an elective office, but had centered his ambition on the prizes of his own profession, one of which came to him when he was appointed United States Judge for the circuit which embraced Ohio.

* * *

Much too often a judge on the bench like a professor in a college, is forced to dea with theories and with facts presented by evidence, so that he lacks experience of business affairs in actual contact. This might have been the case with Judge Taft at this period of his career, had it not been for a peculiar combination of circumstances. The first development of his extraordinary executive capacity came while he was a judge on the bench and not while he was Governor of the Philippines, as many people suppose. From 1892 until almost the close of the century, there was a period of intense financial

depression, followed by a slow recovery. There had been an over-expansion of northern capital in the border and southern states. All sorts of manufacturing, railroad and mining enterprises in the South had been clamoring for development, and the North was called upon to supply the money. Some of these investments were spread out too thin, and when the financial crisis came, one company after another went to the wall. The sixth judicial circuit in which Judge Taft was located covered the states of Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee. His court was inundated with receivership cases and complex litigation involving all sorts of industrial enterprises. Judge Taft soon found himself in the position of a managing partner or acting director for manufacturing plants, iron mines, railroads, and a dozen other growing concerns. To knowledge of the law it was indispensable that he should add business capacity. It was in this way that he developed executive ability, and he learned the secret of large affairs while administering the estates of great corporations which had

been forced to become wards of the court as a result of financial difficulties.

It was a good school and the Judge was an apt scholar at this, as at every other study. He was forced to become acquainted with financial management on a large scale, and in his efforts to restore the property and save it for its owners it became necessary that he should learn the details of the business. Multifarious interests were at stake, receivers were constantly reporting to the court on a variety of industrial issues, labor unions sought the protection of the judiciary and the court became an industrial and commercial clearing house, the Judge being called upon to exercise something vastly greater than mere judicial functions. It was the location of the court, embracing states both north and south of the boundary line between the two sections, and the peculiarity of the time of great commercial depression, which combined to bring out the executive capacity of Judge Taft and to prevent his becoming a mere bundle of law and a dealer in profound abstractions. Beyond all doubt,

it was this period in his career which developed his capacity for public affairs; and so it was that, when he was translated from the bench to the unfamiliar ground of the Philippine Islands, he took hold of the work with the same confidence with which he would have undertaken the organization of another iron mill in Tennessee or a bankrupt stock farm in the blue grass region of Kentucky.

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It was a daring thing to do—to translate a federal judge from the peaceful atmosphere of his court in the Ohio valley to the unfamiliar antipodes of an island empire, unexpectedly acquired by the United States, and the future of which no man could estimate. The cleverest man might have been pardoned for making a failure of such a work, because it involved not only a transition from one side of the world to the other, not only a sudden jump from the law to executive work, but the man who undertook this labor knew, and those who selected him knew, that he must hew a new path for himself and must under-

take a work for which the very framework of the American republic was absolutely unfitted. Time has shown that William McKinley, Mark Hanna and Elihu Root, who were the three men chiefly responsible for the choice, made no mistake when they selected Judge Taft, and yet they must have been fearful, and he must have been afraid, of the results. When in 1900 Judge Taft resigned his comfortable place on the federal bench, which was good during life under ordinary conditions, and put behind him the possibility of promotion to the Supreme Court, which had been his legitimate ideal, he had not the slightest assurance that the Philippines would offer him any permanent field of activity; and he was certainly unaware of the probability that he would emerge from a tour of duty in the islands as one of the marked men of America. Called to an unfamiliar duty, asked to resign a pleasant position from which he could not be ejected, he chose an unpromising line of duty because he believed he was not justified in refusing his services when the President and Secretary of State

demanded in so many words that he give his time to the country without regard to his own personal fortune.

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The situation in the Philippines was a perilous one when Judge Taft was appointed President of the Commission which had been constituted to establish a semblance of civil government in the islands. When Dewey sailed into Manila Bay, no one had the slightest idea that the war would in any way entail upon this country the burden of the management of a vast colony across the Pacific. The war was undertaken for the regeneration of Cuba, and for that alone. The great majority of our people had to take down their atlases to find out where the Philippines were, when the cables first announced briefly that Dewey had smashed up the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay. Even after that splendid victory, few people took time to realize that we had inadvertently saddled ourselves with a responsibility quite similar to that of Great Britain and India. Up to the time of the

signing of the treaty of peace, people were uncertain what was to be done with the Philippines.

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After they came thoroughly into our possession there was no time to formulate theories of government for the islands, because Aguinaldo and his fanatical followers were putting up a fair-sized revolution which could be met only by overwhelming military force. The first year or two of our occupancy was necessarily a period of military operations. Cuba, which had been the bone of contention between Spain and the United States, was at peace from the day of the cessation of hostilities, but the Philippines, which no one had thought of when the war began, still continued to furnish the field for bloody hostilities and an almost savage warfare. Aguinaldo was harassed through and over and around the lakes, the rivers, the swamps and the mountains of Luzon, while expeditionary forces were dispatched to less known islands of the group where savages with un-

familiar names were carrying on intermittent hostilities.

It was at this trying period that Judge Taft was asked to leave Ohio and go to the Philippines to establish there the beginning of civil government. It was a task from which any man might shrink and the successful accomplishment of it is the principal argument of the former governor-general that he is competent to assume the greatest civic responsibility. Our government was not organized with a view to territorial expansion beyond either of the oceans. The theory of our national life was that we would avoid entangling alliances with foreign nations. We do business under a written constitution and all powers not specifically granted to the federal government are reserved to the states. When Taft went to the Philippines no man knew whether they were worth keeping or not, and certainly no one understood either the power or the limitations of the federal government as applied to island possessions on the other side of an ocean from the home government.

For about three years they were governed by the President as commander in chief of the Army and Navy, and even when Congress passed the organic act of 1902, it merely confirmed the half-military and half-civil government created by President McKinley and it even made his instructions to the Secretary of War part of the statutory bill of rights of the islands. When Judge Taft became President of the Philippine Commission, and for a year after his appointment as Civil Governor of the Islands in July, 1901, there was an intermittent state of war between the federal troops and what was left of the insurrectionary forces. It was far from being an auspicious time for the establishment of a successful insular government. Army men insisted that the insurrectionary party would misunderstand any attempt to set up a civil government. There was a strong minority party in the United States which expressed sympathy with the insurrection, and which demanded in party platforms and on the stump that the Filipinos should be given immediate independence. The pre-

vious government of the Islands had been a strange mixture of religious and temporal power, and the whole fabric was tinged with official despotism and dishonor. There was in this country at that time no colonial machinery whatsoever, and no trained body of administrators and civil officers. The very language of the Islands was foreign to us, and intensely foreign at that. Everything conspired to make the task of setting up civil government there novel and hazardous, with the chances all in favor of repeated failures before ultimate success could be reached. It was necessary to keep a large army in condition for immediate service and there was no assurance that a change of administration in the United States might not upset every plan and every assurance and every hope of Governor-General Taft, and those who were working with him to elevate the Filipinos to a position where they might at some time in the future become self-governing.

* * *

The Philippine chapter in the career of

William Howard Taft is merely a repetition of that painstaking, earnest genius which made him an honor man at his college, and which now after the lapse of years has set his feet close to the threshold of the White House. Great things have been accomplished in the Philippines and it is not too much to say, in spite of the hearty co-operation of Presidents McKinley and Roosevelt, and in spite of the wise counsel of Elihu Root, when he was Secretary of War, that to Governor Taft and then to Secretary Taft the chief credit is due, and certain it is that no man in the present administration has ever sought to withhold the full measure of that credit from him.

It would require a volume to tell in detail what has been done in the Philippines, but as a measure of executive capacity and as a demonstration of his fitness for the presidency, Secretary Taft needs only to have the people understand in a general way just what he did and is still doing to regenerate and uplift an alien people who in such a strange way have become the wards of this Yankee government of ours.

In the first place it is worth while noting that the islands are in a state of absolute tranquility. That has been accomplished largely, if not entirely, by the personal influence of the Governor-General. The Filipinos learned to know that he was honest and that he was devoted to their interest. He did not promise them independence today or tomorrow or the day after. He neither cajoled nor bullied nor cringed. With infinite tact and with a positive genius for leadership, Governer Taft convinced these strange people, speaking another language, that he at least would do the best thing in his power for their material, mental, and spiritual comfort. A system of education has been built up and half a million children are now being taught to read and write English. The foundation has been laid firmly and securely for a primary and industrial educational system which is likely to be the most lasting benefit conferred on the islands by the American government. Sanitation for the people and government supervision to preserve the health of their flocks and herds have both

been successfully introduced. A judicial system has been established which has been a revelation to the people there, who were accustomed only to the cumbrous and corrupt methods of the Spanish courts. Public improvements have been undertaken, roads built, docks constructed, streets improved, a complete system of posts, telephones and telegraphs established, and railroads built, which in five years will furnish a system of 1,000 miles in extent. A civil system has been inaugurated which has divided the public work between the Americans and the Filipinos with a constantly increased representation of the natives. Public lands have been opened for settlement, semi-official banks have been established, and the financial status of the Philippine government today is practically beyond criticism.

* * *

These are accomplished facts, not theories or promises to pay. It is a record of things done, a story of accomplishment which tells its own tale as to the masterful executive

genius of the man who is chiefly responsible for these splendid results.

If the Philippines furnished a field for the development of a capacity for creating civil government, the Isthmus of Panama developed another angle of the many-sided executive life of William Howard Taft. He had scarcely been appointed Secretary of War before President Roosevelt issued an executive order placing the work of the Isthmian canal commission under his immediate supervision, "both in the construction of the canal and the exercise of such governmental powers as it seems necessary for the United States to exercise under the treaty with the republic of Panama in the canal strip."

Interoceanic canals are not dug every day. The work is one which involves, in the case of Panama, the most delicate civil functions harmoniously blended with the professional discipline exercised by the engineer officers of the army. The canal is the largest single public work ever undertaken by the United States, and will continue to furnish

problems in the next administration and for years thereafter. It is part of the Presidential capital of Secretary Taft that he has been with the canal from the start, and that he has been forced to study the engineering problems it presents at first hand. One engineer after another abandoned the work, but the Secretary was always steadfast, never discouraged, and never ready to abandon the effort necessary to secure success. The story of his trips to and from the Isthmus, of the confusion which had to be adjusted, of the jealousies and rivalries between men which needed to be composed, and of the financial and civil questions which were brought before the Secretary for settlement, is a tale of that same hard work which has made Taft a success in life.

* * *

In November, 1904, Secretary Taft made his first visit to the Isthmus, and a full account of what he accomplished at that time, forming the first authentic report of actual conditions on the Isthmus, was submitted

to the President in January, 1905. Early in the summer, Chief Engineer Wallace tendered his resignation and the Secretary was forced to provide a new head for the work.

In the following October he was once more en route to the Isthmus, and during the winter he was almost constantly engaged as a witness before the senate committee explaining the actual conditions of the work and defending the administration from the partisan attacks made upon it. In January of 1906, Secretary Taft, in a luminous letter which was published broadcast throughout the world, exposed the folly of hasty criticisms made by Poultney Bigelow and others who had studied only the fringe of things on the Isthmus. In the following winter another trip was necessary, the Secretary being accompanied this time by the distinguished consulting engineers who were asked to report with him upon the nature of the location of the Gatun lock and dam sites. The result of this personal inspection was a professional, scientific demonstration of the safety and the satisfactory condition of the

sites for the great dam, both at Gatun and on the Pacific side of the canal.

While on the Isthmus, Secretary Taft, by special direction of the President, found time to drop the engineering side and to conduct an investigation into various perplexing questions regarding the labor supply. On his return a full report on this subject was made to the President by the hard-working secretary, and it is significant that the agreement drawn up in that report was accepted by all of the laborers who were concerned, and all danger of serious labor troubles from that source was removed at once and for good by the wise and temperate decisions of the Secretary of War.

* * *

In March, 1907, Chief Engineer Stevens also retired from the work and upon Secretary Taft was put the great burden of reorganizing the whole work on the Panama canal. He did this with the greatest success. The canal commission was reorganized by the appointment of army and navy engineers. This put

the construction of the canal directly under the personal supervision of the United States government and relieved the great work from the jealousies and interference of private persons.

Since that time, Secretary Taft has found time to reconstruct the accounting department, to transfer the adjustment of accounts between the railroad company and the commission to the Isthmus, to institute inquiries with a view to establishing a Pacific coast line of steamships, to recommend a widening of the locks and a change of location of some of them, to put into effect a system of trial by jury, to limit the employment of skilled laborers, clerks and similar employes to American citizens, to adjust differences with the local Panama officers, and to do a few other things in addition to directing the Chief of Engineers in the actual work of digging the canal. A mere inspection of the official record in regard to the canal will show to how great an extent this one man has acquired the capacity for untiring work and has achieved probably a better

training for the Chief Magistracy in its purely technical details than any other American citizen has ever had.

Purely domestic government is by no means the principal or even the most important work of a President. In our relations with foreign governments we must necessarily depend on the Chief Executive. The Constitution gives him the power to appoint all our diplomatic representatives. He it is who must make all our treaties in their first instance, and through the Secretary of State he conducts all intercourse with foreign nations. It is an offense for a diplomatic representative of a foreign nation to deal direct with the congress or the courts. He must proceed through the State Department, and the Ambassadors of the great nations invariably insist upon conducting their business at first hand with the President himself. The result is that our Presidents must become adepts in international law. It is impossible that the country at large should be kept informed day by day as to the progress of diplomatic negotiations. Even the

senate is consulted only when a treaty is concluded. It is for the President through his Secretary of State and in person to meet the demands of foreign governments and to maintain both the dignity and honor of the United States. A weak man might surrender with dishonor, a foolish man might precipitate the country into a foolish war, and an ignorant man might involve us in untold difficulties without knowing just what the matter was.

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It is fortunate for the country that this many-sided man has been put into a position where he has been compelled to meet the most delicate international questions. That he has succeeded in each case is all the more to his credit, because after all, diplomacy is something entirely foreign to the administration of an insular government, the building of a huge artificial waterway, or the proper conduct of an army system.

Almost at the beginning of his work in the Philippines, the new Governor-General

was confronted with a situation which required for its adjustment the very highest grade of diplomatic ability. A large proportion of the lands in the islands were in the undisputed possession of certain religious orders, which had a title dating back for hundreds of years, and backed up by the royal patents of Spain. The conditions in the islands were such that the continued occupation of these lands by the religious orders would surely have provoked continuous insurrections. It was absolutely indispensable that these lands should be withdrawn from their religious ownership and distributed among the people, it being evident that popular ownership in the Philippines as elsewhere would be the surest guarantee of peace.

The point of view of the religious orders and of the people was diametrically opposite. Our government had no machinery for dealing with such a question. It was necessary to pacify the people, but the legal titles to the lands were undeniably good. In this emergency, Secretary Taft was dispatched direct to the Pope of Rome. It was an ex-

traordinary mission. He was called upon to negotiate with a religious Prince with whom we had and could have no diplomatic relations. The question at issue was a dangerous one, because it involved the creation of relations between church and state which are absolutely foreign to our form of government. We had taken the islands from a loyal son of the church and we were assuming to build up a new civilization there in which the church was to be divorced once and for all from the government.

This historic conference between the Holy Father and the Governor-General of the Philippines is almost unique in diplomacy. The results obtained by clear understanding between these two honest men were almost stupendous. It was necessary to eliminate the religious orders as agricultural landlords, and at the same time this had to be done without infringing in any way upon the rights of the Roman Catholic Church, whose great influence for good in the islands no one denied. A basis of agreement was found, the United States agreed to pay a sum con-

siderably in excess of what it believed the lands were worth, but it did so because prompt action was necessary to prevent continuous revolutions. The visit to the Pope and the personal intercession of the Governor-General resulted in the Holy Father sending an apostolic delegate to the Islands with adequate powers, as a result of which the lands were turned over to the insular government for $7,000,000, and the Hierarchy agreed to send no friars as parish priests in any case where the Governor-General makes final objection. The acquisition of these lands by the government and the adjustment of differences as to the employment of friars as parish priests brought peace to the islands, and it was done in such a way that the strongest supporter and admirer of the American government in the Philippines today is the Church of Rome.

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Another and totally different phase of international politics is presented in the case of Cuba. Here too, Taft, the man of action, was called upon to represent the government

of the United States in unfamiliar conditions, and to create for an alien people a temporary government to succeed the unfortunate republic which they had themselves failed utterly to maintain. The island of Cuba was as much under the personal control and direction of the former Secretary of War as is the Panama canal or the Philippines. His was the guiding hand, his is the strong arm, and it was his visit to the island which brought peace out of chaos and which taught the Cuban people to look up to the integrity and to the genius of one great American citizen.

It is extraordinary, of course, that this one man of all those who have contributed to make the administration of Theodore Roosevelt brilliant should always have been in such a position as to be called upon for peculiar service in emergencies. It may be fate or it may be accident, but it is certainly true that almost every great and unusual governmental problem which has been presented to the country in the last five or six years has in some way invoked the executive assistance of Secretary Taft.

Early in September, 1906, our consul general at Havana began to notify the government that the Cuban republic under President Palma was fast going to pieces. Events moved with extraordinary rapidity. The insurgent forces in the vicinity of Havana pressed into the suburbs. The Cuban President, an honest and a gentle citizen, called upon to exercise unusual responsibility, was unable to protect life and property. He asked the United States to send war vessels and his request was acceded to. President Palma resolved not to continue at the head of an inefficient government, the Vice-President of Cuba decided not to accept the office, the cabinet ministers declared that they would resign, and there was imminent a total absence of legal power with a certain state of anarchy as the result.

* * *

In the middle of September, President Roosevelt, then at Oyster Bay, called upon the Secretary of War to go to Havana at once to restore order. Mr. Taft responded with

customary alacrity. Inside of two days, he wrote the President that the army was ready to meet the call of a possible forcible intervention, and he had prepared an opinion by the Judge Advocate General showing the right of the President to intervene under the Platt amendment without additional authority from Congress. Accompanied by the Assistant Secretary of State, Mr. Taft and his party proceeded to Cuba by war-ship from Tampa, reaching Havana September 19. The Cuban Secretary of State called at once and admitted the situation was serious. Then followed a series of conferences with President Palma, with the opposition, with the representatives of foreign governments and with the revolutionary generals whose activity had precipitated the fall of the first Cuban republic.

At the time Secretary Taft reached Cuba, nearly 10,000 men were ready to march into the city of Havana. In anticipation of intervention, the general staff of the United States army had prepared plans for landing an expeditionary force of 18,000 men and the

Secretary carried with him telegraphic orders which could be issued within two hours. Few, if any, of these troops were needed. The mere presence of the Secretary of War of the United States was sufficient to put an end to the fighting. Ten days after his arrival, Secretary Taft, with the approval of the President, proclaimed himself provisional governor of Cuba, thus adding another page to his extraordinary history as a public man. The insurgents were rapidly disarmed and a provisional government was established without recourse to military force. It was a triumph of tact and of adaptability, the experience of the Secretary of War in dealing with Spanish-speaking people in the Philippines having been utilized to the utmost extent.

By the following October, or within a month after he had landed in the islands, Secretary Taft had brought order out of chaos, and had solidified public sentiment to such an extent that he was enabled to turn the government of the islands over to Governor Magoon, who was brought from the Isthmus of Panama for that purpose.

Since that time the administration of the Island of Cuba has been largely under the direction of the Secretary of War. The problem there was the creation of a new form of government which would be so stable that it could not be readily overturned and which would be based on the sure foundation of abstract democracy. Before long a new Cuban republic will rise upon the ashes of the one which was destroyed in September, 1906. It is the last chance for Cuba, and President Roosevelt has insisted that Secretary Taft should give to the Cubans every possible opportunity to demonstrate to the world their ability for self-government. If the habit of creating revolutions continues, however, the United States will again be called upon to intervene, and in any event, Cuba, like the Panama canal, will be a legacy from the present to the future administration, so that the peculiar training of the Secretary of War will be as valuable in one case as in the other.

During a good part of the year 1907, the relations between the United States and

Japan, while not seriously strained, were extremely delicate. It was fortunate for the country that Secretary Taft happened to be on his way to the Philippines in the fall of 1907, to participate in the inauguration of the first popular legislative assembly in the islands. The diplomatic story of the relations between Japan and the United States may not be told for some time to come, because all of the results have not been achieved. It is the simple truth, however, that the fortuitous visit to Japan of Secretary Taft in September, 1907, and the interviews he held at that time with the Emperor himself, the prime minister, the minister of foreign affairs, and many other Japanese dignitaries, had a great deal to do with the preservation of peaceful relations between the two nations, and with the production of the more cordial understanding of the differences growing out of the immigration question.

* * *

The Secretary's cables from Japan to Washington at this period, if they are ever

published, will fully sustain his reputation as a diplomatist of the first rank. He received personal assurances that Japan neither desired war with the United States nor was in a condition financially to wage one. At the same time he discovered that the proposition for a mutual exclusion treaty was distasteful to the Japanese unless it included Europeans as well, and that if this policy were persisted in by the United States it would result in a destruction of friendly relations to a certain extent. It was Taft who conveyed to Minister Hayashi and to the Emperor the positive denial of the absurd story that the United States was proposing to sell the Philippines, and it was to him that the Japanese declared that, while they might resent the occupation of the islands by any European nation, they would always welcome American control as at present, or a future independent Philippine government under the strong protectorate of the United States.

The visit to the Philippines and the return through Russia, thus encircling the globe, was a spectacular affair, even for such an

official globe trotter as the Secretary of War, but it may be doubted if any incident of that journey, and indeed any incident of his whole career, called for the exercise of more delicate statecraft than the series of interviews, in the latter part of September, when Secretary Taft was sojourning in the Shiba Palace as the guest of the Emperor of Japan. All the world was watching our great battleship fleet, then making ready for its trip to the Pacific, and an imprudent emissary, or a truculent host might between them have precipitated a conflict which both nations would have regretted ever afterward.

These are the important features in the official life of Secretary Taft, and they are the things to which one readily recurs in attempting to show how strangely fate has seen to it that he should be specially trained for the duties of the presidential office. It is a great thing to dig a canal or to reconstruct a republic, or to fit people for self-government, but, after all, these great things must be fortified by regular, persistent, and successful daily work.

It so happens that in the mastery of routine, in the ability to handle men in public office, in industry, in the intuitive capacity for understanding great things at a glance, the Secretary of War has best demonstrated his fitness for still higher office. As one goes up the scale, either in business or in governmental work, the thing most necessary in an executive officer is the ability to get at the meat of a subject in the shortest possible time, and, by avoiding unnecessary details, to concentrate the attention on the important features. This is executive capacity in a nutshell. Many good men have never been able to learn it, and some people who have learned it are not good men. It is the combination of unquestioned integrity with proved executive ability which makes Secretary Taft specially fitted for the only office within the American republic which involves greater responsibilities and greater demands upon the individual than that which Mr. Taft held until nominated for the presidency.

To be successful as a president, a man must necessarily have not only a great power

of initiative, unwearying tact, a vast fund of patience, the ability to "size up" men correctly, and that faculty of leadership which attracts other men to the standard and infuses into them the necessary enthusiasm, but he must possess to a high degree that subtle characteristic we call executive ability, which is nothing more nor less than a capacity for the neglect of little things, and the rapid seizure upon the essential of any great question.

It is in this regard more than in anything else that Secretary Taft has succeeded. His purely departmental training has been superb. When not inspecting a canal or preaching patience to fiery Spaniards, he has been consulting with gray-haired colonels over the management of the army, discussing the fortification of seaport towns, examining projects for the improvement of rivers and harbors, considering the question of the water supply at Niagara Falls, arranging for tests of dirigible balloons, studying the estimates of army expenditures to see where they can be profitably pruned, and a dozen other

avenues of activity, learning every minute the great trade of government.

* * *

It would perhaps be unfair to both men to contrast a man of affairs like Taft with a doctrinaire like Bryan, and yet such comparisons are inevitable. One does not choose a preacher to run a locomotive, nor would one expect a railway fireman to preach a good sermon. We send our future lawyers and doctors to professional schools, the trades union prescribes the qualifications for an apprentice boy, and the whole tendency of our twentieth-century life is in the direction of special education for particular effort. The American people have just as much right to demand that their President shall have satisfactory previous experience as they have to insist that the humble clerk in the government department shall pass a successful service examination.

This sketch is not intended as a panegyric upon the Secretary of War. It is merely an attempt to show in a plain, logical, matter-of-

fact sort of way that the course of events during the last ten years has put William Howard Taft in a position where he had to learn the science of government or become a public failure. That he has not failed in any one of the manifold responsibilities which have been put upon him, all the world knows. It follows that upon him, more than upon any other one man in this country, the people can more safely place the responsibility as well as the honor of the Chief Magistracy of the republic.

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